



December 12, 2003

Dear Citizen:

While Waukesha County faced a number of financial challenges in creating the 2004 County Budget, it should be noted that our County government's fiscal health is excellent. We should be proud of the steps we have taken in the past because they have provided us with a solid fiscal foundation during this soft economy. While other governments have experienced large budget deficits and sinking bond ratings, Waukesha County remains a model of how things are done right.

Our financial acumen has been tested during this year's process due to budget pressures from significantly diminishing state aids, ever escalating health care costs and the growing needs of our rapidly urbanizing County, while property taxpayers are demanding relief like never before.

Over the years we have faced many fiscal challenges. Without question these issues that now confront us are more daunting than those previously experienced. This budget offers few new initiatives and begins to reduce identified non-essential services.

Our budget theme is "Meeting Today's Challenges" and reflects our willingness to stand up to these fiscal pressures and resolve them in the Waukesha County way. This means no tricks. No gimmicks; but rather sound, long term financial solutions. We need to reaffirm our core responsibilities as county government and trim what is not essential. Radical, cosmetic actions will only come back to hurt our citizens in the future.

This budget reflects Waukesha County's commitment to financial integrity, and our core values in providing responsible and effective government services. In doing so, we have made difficult decisions to balance our needs with the desire for a limited, but fiscally responsible government.

We are proud to indicate that this budget addresses our County's core service priorities while reducing the county property tax rate for the 14th consecutive year. As proposed, the County property tax rate will drop to \$2.21 per \$1,000 in equalized value. Our commitment to fiscal responsibility remains a key value.

This year, department administrators have continued to "Meet Today's Challenges" by making tough choices in their budgets under tighter than normal budget guidelines. They have acted to reduce budget costs, to find additional new grant revenues and other revenue sources, to use cost effective innovation to maintain service levels and to terminate non-essential or non-mandated services. Listed below are some of the tough budget choices we have made to reduce funding in certain programs from their 2003 levels.

- The UW Extension Office tax levy base for 2004 is reduced by \$100,000, as the department plans to focus on generating grant funding for specific program services.
- The tax levy for transit services is reduced \$50,000 from the 2003 budget level.
- The county is mandated to pay most costs related to the state court system and thus, will need to levy nearly \$128,000 of additional property taxes to support State Circuit Courts for 2004.
- The State budget reduces \$160,00 of Income Maintenance administration funding to the County.
- Certain non-core, non-mandated human services programs are being eliminated in this budget due to fiscal pressures in mandated programs. Reductions include the final phase-out of the Basic Assistance and Services for Individuals in Crisis (BASIC) medical payment program and the indigent burial program.

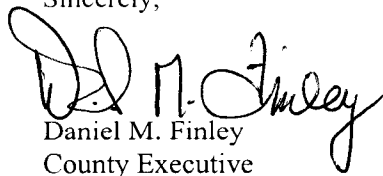
Under mounting fiscal pressures, and when timing of the economic turnaround is still uncertain, we need to continue to make careful management decisions and good investments in cost-effective initiatives for our future. Listed below are the few new initiatives in the 2004 budget.

- The new Public Works Communication Center will deliver efficient and reliable shared dispatch services with an investment in the most current technology to assist a seamless transition to the combined emergency dispatch and call taking services for 29 municipalities in 2004. The 2004 operating budget includes \$1.7 million for dispatch start up operations including \$1.472 million of additional tax levy over the 2003 base budget.
- An additional \$100,000 was appropriated to the Criminal Justice Collaboration Council budget. This includes \$50,000 to develop a new cost saving initiative aimed at controlling or reducing jail inmate population growth and reducing inmate recidivism.
- The budget provides a first-year grant payment of \$140,000 funded with general fund balance for countywide Hazmat response.

The 2004 adopted budget represents our County's ability to "Meet Today's Challenges" with financial integrity. We will continue to lead the way with sound long term solutions rather than being reactive. Utilizing strong financial management principles and consistent budgeting practices will lead the way to maintain control of taxes and spending that achieve results.

An enormous amount of time and energy has gone into the preparation of the 2004 Waukesha County Budget. I would like to commend the department administrators and staff for their extra effort in developing this challenging budget. In addition, I would like to extend a sincere thank you to the County Board of Supervisors for their thorough review and approval of the budget. Working together we have created a responsible budget that meets the needs of citizens in Waukesha County.

Sincerely,



Daniel M. Finley
County Executive